121 the Ba-Ronga of Delagoa Bay was first published in my French book *Les Ba-Ronga* with the kind help of the Geographical Society of Neuchâtel in 1898. Since then I have pursued my studies amongst the Northern Clans of the Thongas of the Transvaal and, if I am able to undertake this publication, in which I hope to give a more complete description of the life of a South African tribe, I feel that I owe to my distinguished visitor the generating idea, the decisive impulse.

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000 This was the right moment to undertake this enquiry, as the following sad experience will plainly show. Coming home in 1909, I met, on board the splendid U. C. Steamer on which we were travelling, three well known Native gentlemen who were, I think, going to England for political reasons. I had great pleasure in speaking with them. One of them was the editor of a Native paper; another was a Christian chief, the third was at the head of a Training Institution which he had founded himself. One day I made up my mind to gather some ethnographical facts from them. They were Zulus, and I wanted to know for purposes of comparison what were the precise ideas of their tribe about witchcraft. Never in my scientific career did I meet with a more complete failure! The editor had been born in a Wesleyan family, and never lived amongst heathen. The chief knew much more on the subject but, for some obscure reason, was not inclined to disclose his knowledge. The Principal of the Institution was a very clever man; he first declared that witchcraft was met with amongst white people just the same as amongst South African Natives, and that it was only a form of mesmerism; and, as he was always anxious to get more knowledge himself, he proceeded to question me about mesmerism; the whole interview ended therefore in a lesson which I was obliged to give him on that mysterious subject, and I did not learn anything new from my three friends... I left them in quite a melancholy mood, thinking how different it was with my Thonga informants, Mboza, Tobane and even Elias!

123 In fact, the circumstances in which I found myself amongst the Thongas, were the most favourable imaginable for such an investigation. The great bulk of the tribe is still absolutely savage. We have mastered its language and can understand all they tell us. On the other hand we have founded a Church amongst them and have

123 intimate relations with some of them. The adults in our congregations
115 have been heathen themselves and have practised the rites on which I questioned them. They can describe them better than raw heathens, as they now stand at a certain distance from their old life and can judge of it more independently. They possess what our French historians call *le recul nécessaire*. Enjoying their full confidence, having learned by long practice how to put questions in order to get impartial answers, I think that their testimony can be considered as scientifically reliable. Of course errors are always possible. But science proceeds by successive approximations. I dare say the present monograph of the Thonga tribe, compared with my book *Les Ba-Ronga*, will be a nearer approach to the truth, and it is quite possible that later on a more perfect account will be given by somebody who has had more time to spare and more insight than myself into this delicate work.

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115 When a historian publishes a monograph, he first gives a list of his sources of information. He vindicates the truth of his results by showing that they are based on trustworthy documents. My documents are not books. They are living witnesses, and I beg to introduce some of them to my readers, as they have been my faithful collaborators and I owe to them most of my knowledge.

The first man whom I questioned systematically was a Ronga of Nondwane (North of Lourenço Marques) named *Spoon*. He had been my butterfly catcher and I had often admired his skill and his powers of observation. He became my instructor in the art of bone throwing. He had been more or less a diviner, using his dice when going to hunt ; but after the war of the Natives against the Portuguese (1894-1895) he lost confidence in his divinatory bones as well as in his gods, and became a Christian. He always had a great deal of imagination. I was often obliged to verify his explanations. Spoon certainly had the mythological sense more developed than any of my other informants ; however he was through and through a Bantu and whatever he said was always picturesque and striking. He died in 1924.

After him, I undertook to gather all the knowledge possessed by *Tobane*. Tobane was a splendid man when I knew him in Lourenço Marques, in the years 1895 and 1896. Tall, of a remarkably light complexion, his eyes very clear and bright, he was a man of mark in the